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Letter dated 28 October 2009 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of my Government, I have the honour to convey to you the position of the Syrian Arab Republic in respect of your report on the oil slick on Lebanese shores (A/64/259).

It is common knowledge that the oil slick was caused by the savage, repeated and deliberate bombing by Israel on 13 and 15 July 2006 of the oil storage tanks at the Lebanese Jiyeh electric power plant. The bombings, which were part of the barbaric Israeli aggression against Lebanon, caused an oil slick that covered the entirety of the Lebanese coastline and precipitated a grave environmental and economic disaster, the effects of which are still apparent. The prevailing winds and marine currents carried the slick onto the Syrian coastline, polluting a large portion thereof. This has been verified by satellite images, reports of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other United Nations reports that have been submitted to the Second Committee since 2007, the latest of which is the present report of the Secretary-General, and has been affirmed by General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188 and 63/211.

On 30 July 2006, after the oil slick had spread to the Syrian shoreline, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic launched a comprehensive campaign to clean up polluted shores and undertook maritime patrols in order to monitor the slick. On 2 August 2006, another section of the oil slick washed up on the Syrian coastline. On 8 August 2006, UNEP dispatched two experts, who conducted an on-site assessment and confirmed the damage done by the oil slick. The Syrian Government undertook to control the spread of the slick and clean up its shores on its own, using local resources and capacities and without any international assistance. To date, it is impossible to assess the short- and long-term damage done to the marine ecosystem from the sharp rise in the concentration of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons resulting from the oil spill.

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In paragraph 4 of its resolution 63/211, the General Assembly called on the Government of Israel to assume responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to the Government of Lebanon and other countries directly affected by the oil slick, such as the Syrian Arab Republic whose shores have been partially polluted, for the costs of repairing the environmental damage caused by the destruction, including the restoration of the marine environment.

The report of the Secretary-General, which was submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 63/211, indicates that Israel has yet to assume its responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to the Government of Lebanon. However, the report fails to note that Israel has not yet made prompt and adequate compensation to Syria. My country is surprised that although the Secretary-General's report urges Israel to take the necessary actions towards assuming responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to Lebanon, it does not urge Israel to also assume its responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to Syria. The report therefore does not completely reflect the mandate with which the Secretary-General was entrusted, as set out in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 63/211. That mandate was affirmed by the majority of Member States when the Assembly adopted the aforementioned resolution at its sixty-third session. Reports of the Secretary-General that are prepared in pursuance of General Assembly resolutions should strictly adhere to the mandates contained therein because reaching agreement among Member States on resolutions requires strenuous effort and lengthy negotiations and discussions.

In that connection, my country stands ready to provide the Secretariat with information regarding the extent of the environmental damage caused by the spread of the oil slick into its territorial waters and onto its shoreline, and the cost of repairing that damage, so that the Secretariat may follow up on the implementation of the mandate entrusted to it under General Assembly resolution 63/211, as is customary.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as an official document of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 53, which is allocated to the Second Committee.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Permanent Representative
Ambassador